

FY14 Q5 Report: October - December 2014



Submitted: January 31st, 2015

The Southeast Economic Recovery and Protection Project (SERAP)

Funded by USAID / Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA)

1. Executive Summary

The Southeast Economic Recovery and Protection Project (SERAP) began in June 2013 to respond to the mounting protection and relief needs of conflict-affected communities in Southeastern Central African Republic (CAR). The goal of the program is to increase food security, enhance community resilience and strengthen the protective environment via community-based mechanisms for children, women and men affected by conflict in the Mbomou prefecture, including survivors, escapees and host communities.

During the reporting period, the project achieved the following:

- Food security activities were officially launched in December 2014 with an expected 2,600 beneficiaries to begin training and receiving support via vouchers and technical support in Q6.
- Nearly half of all resilience groups in Bangassou, or 156 individuals, received VSLA trainings.
- Greater emphasis was placed on preventative GBV measures such as prioritizing outreach in the surrounding areas and the launching in Q6 of discussion groups and informal couples counseling sessions.
- The two Listening Centers responded to 144 cases throughout the reporting period, 51 of which were children under the age of 18.

2. Program Overview

SERAP was designed to respond to the mounting protection and relief needs of conflict-affected communities in southeastern CAR. Mbomou Prefecture has been particularly affected, following the repeated civil conflict and attacks by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) that have persisted in 2012 as well as new conflict caused by the Séléka rebel coalition. Mercy Corps has built upon the foundation of past successful protection programs in Rafai, Bangassou and surrounding areas, providing much-needed assistance in the areas of psychosocial support, GBV prevention and response, health, and economic support to internally displaced persons (IDPs). This program enables Mercy Corps to provide urgently needed support to LRA conflict-affected survivors and other vulnerable communities through interventions in child protection, agriculture, food security, and socio-economic support, as well as humanitarian coordination and information management. It also enables Mercy Corps to continue to build the capacity of other organizations to respond to protection needs.

Expected Results:

- 33,381 vulnerable people, including 3,000 IDPs in LRA-affected communities will continue to have access to protection services, including prevention and response to GBV;
- 3,500 vulnerable people, including 2,000 IDPs in LRA-affected communities will have restored assets in order to promote livelihoods and economic recovery;
- 2,000 vulnerable people, including 1,250 IDPs in LRA-affected communities will have improved agriculture livelihoods and income generation opportunities;
- Surveillance information will be collected to provide timely and rigorous early warning and vulnerability information on emerging and evolving crises situations for 93,457 people living in the Mbomou prefecture, including 10,000 IDPs.

In September 2014 Mercy Corps signed a modification to the award extending the Southeast Economic Recovery and Protection Project activities until September 2015. Identification and

referral services of survivors of violence, abduction or displacement, including psychosocial support via the two listening centers, as well as support to restart livelihoods, will continue. Mercy Corps will likewise continue community awareness raising campaigns on child rights and GBV issues via the child protection committees and community counselors.

3. Security

The security situation in Mbomou prefecture continues to remain more stable than much of the rest of the country. While the CAR law enforcement presence is minimal in Bangassou, and non-existent in Rafai, there remains a MINUSCA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic) presence in both Bangassou and Rafai. Neither town currently has an official Séléka or Anti-Balaka presence, although individual Séléka members are rumored to circulate extremely closely to both towns causing tension and nervousness amongst the local populations.

However, both Séléka and Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) movements have been noted in distances as short as 5 kilometers outside of Bangassou. Listening Centers in both Bangassou and Rafai typically receive cases related to gender based violence, and in December 2014 both listening centers received cases of survivors of LRA attacks. Additionally, rumors continue to threaten the stability of communities; for example, an ultimately false rumor of an impending Séléka attack emptied out the Bangassou market on a Saturday morning in late December. In addition, the continued insecurity in Bangui and Bambari means the southeast remains cut-off from the rest of the country, causing tension among the population due to a lack of services and materials and potential future conflict.

Both the volatile security situation in Bangui and unpredictable UN Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) schedules have had an impact on our staff's flight to the Southeast. This has restricted the ability of Mercy Corps to move staff and resources into the field. Informed by our recent security assessments, in October, Mercy Corps lifted its 5 kilometer movement restriction for Bangassou and Rafai allowing staff to focus on outreach and service provision in the surrounding rural areas.

Criminal and militia activity on the roads between Bangui and Bangassou poses mounting significant logistical and security problems. Many items needed to implement activities - e.g. fuel, construction materials for rehabilitation of the listening center or for reparations of the Mercy Corps offices, etc. – arrive via road transportation. In November, a truck transporting Mercy Corps materials, including gas and the personal effects of newly hired Mercy Corps-Bangassou staff, was pillaged in the town of Alindao. Given the travelling distances required for items to arrive in both Bangassou and Rafai, Mercy Corps continues to prioritize convoy travel with other NGO trucks.

Performance Summary

Award-level Beneficiaries

Cumulative Period Targeted		Reporting Period Reached		Cumulative Period Reached	
Total	IDP	Total	IDP	Total	IDP
93,457	10,000	32,831	2,298	122,976	11,538

Progress to Date

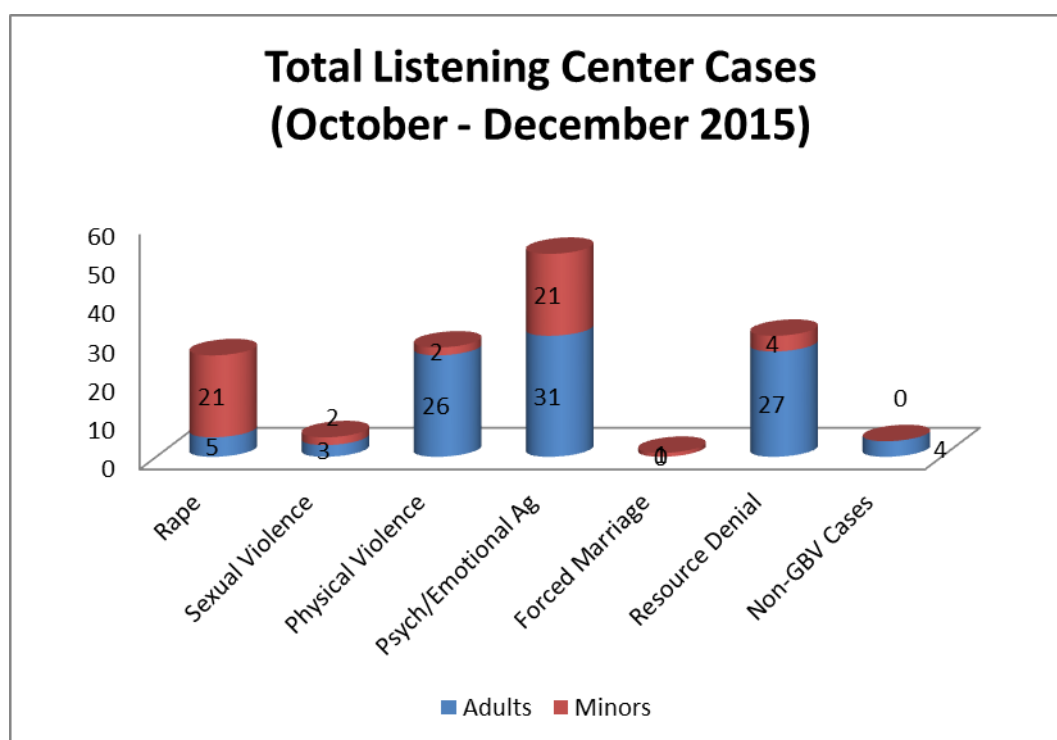
SECTOR #1		<i>Objective:</i> LRA-affected populations have continued access to protection services			
PROTECTION					
Geographic Area (s)		Mbomou Prefecture in Southeastern CAR, with particular focus in the towns of Rafai, Agoumar, Selim, Dembia, Geurekindo and surrounding villages			
Beneficiaries Targeted	Total: 15,000	IDP : 3,000			
Beneficiaries Reached (Reporting Period)	Total: 32,831	IDP: 2,298			
Beneficiaries Reached (Cumulative)	Total: 90,145	IDP: 10,706			
Subsector: Child Protection					
INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Applicable	Cumulative Value Targeted	Reporting Period Reached	Cumulative Reached
Number of people trained in child protection, disaggregated by sex	Male	Yes	5,662	6,441	24,838
	Female	Yes	10,608	10,608	30,221
	Other	Yes	NA	NA	NA
Percentage of targeted children reporting an improvement in their sense of safety and well-being at program close, disaggregated by sex.	Boys	Yes	75%	0*	93% as of mid-term evaluation conducted in August 2014
	Girls	Yes	75%	0*	88% as of Mid-term evaluation conducted in August 2014
	Other	Yes	NA	NA	NA
Subsector: Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence					
INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Applicable	Cumulative Value Targeted	Reporting Period Reached	Cumulative Reached
Number of individuals benefitting from GBV	Male	Yes	3,500	6,952	34,813
	Female	Yes	3,500	8,798	44,496

services, by sex	Other	Yes	NA	NA	NA
Number of people trained in GBV prevention or response, by sex	Male	Yes	20	24	131
	Female	Yes	15	8	44
	Other	Yes	NA	NA	NA
Subsector: Psychosocial Support Services					
INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Applicable	Cumulative Value Targeted	Reporting Period Reached	Cumulative Reached
Number of people trained in psychosocial support services, by sex	Male	Yes	0	0	0
	Female	Yes	21	0	40
	Other	Yes	NA	NA	NA

***Concerning results to report for the second year of the program, this indicator will be measured at the close of the program**

Gender Based Violence Prevention and Response

The listening centers in Rafai and Bangassou received 147 GBV and conflict related cases during this reporting period. Cases were given psychosocial support and medical referrals as needed. In this reporting period, the following types of GBV were received:



As referenced above, psychological/emotional abuse cases remain the most prevalent forms of GBV recorded by psychosocial agents in the Mercy Corps listening centers, accounting for 52, or 35% of, cases. Mercy Corps staff has noted that the overwhelming majority of these cases, as well as the cases of physical violence, take place between family members and often between intimate partners. In this last reporting period we finalized staff recruitment for all listening centers, which has allowed Mercy Corps to more fully emphasize a preventative approach to gender-based violence in the Bangassou and Rafai areas.

Generally speaking, protection work encompasses two concurrent strands of focus: 1) prevention and 2) response. As stated above, the large majority of GBV cases received at the listening centers are non-conflict related cases. In the spirit of preventative protection work, psychosocial agents in Bangassou have planned to accompany community counselors during their weekly awareness raising events. Next quarter, Mercy Corps will help community counselors organize specific events around improving couples' awareness of GBV, with a particular focus on preventing domestic GBV.

Of note, the listening centers in the southeast received 31% more rape cases than in the last reporting period (18 cases in Q4 and 26 in Q5). We believe that this is a result of increased awareness-raising in the surrounding areas of Bangassou and Rafai. Unfortunately, at a rate of 80%, children under 18 were the overwhelming rape survivors received at the listening centers in the Q5 period. The Mercy Corps child protection committee work and community sensitizations therefore remain as vitally important as ever. While the majority of the 130 GBV cases recorded in the reporting period targeted women and girls, it is also significant that 20 cases, or 14%, also noted men and boys as survivors of gender based violence. Psychosocial agents and Mercy Corps programming continues to ensure a gender neutral approach to GBV survivors via our male and female psychosocial agents.

Also during the reporting period, community counselors and protection committees continued to educate the public on the realities and consequences of gender based violence, child protection, human rights, the dangers of HIV/AIDS, reproductive health, gender equity, the role of the listening center and its referral system. Our informal partnership – elaborated below - with MSF-Belgium have allowed community counselors and protection committee members to communicate more complete service provision information to the local populations. Given that a significant component of protection and GBV case management often includes medical care, Mercy Corps is also currently strengthening informal partnerships with medical service providers in Bangassou and Rafai. MSF-Belgium's public health outreach team in Bangassou is therefore routinely called upon to give one-hour presentations on basic public health information and the services provided at the MSF supported regional hospital in Bangassou. This way we ensure that protection and GBV-related information during our protection and GBV awareness-raising sessions in the community is paired with medical service provision information (e.g. the type of medical care, and costs, currently assured by local medical service providers).

In the Q5 reporting period, community counselors maintained weekly community sensitizations to raise awareness on GBV related issues ultimately reaching over 15,000 individuals.

Community Counselor Sensitization Impact Oct - Dec 2014				
Women	Men	Girls	Boys	Total

5,426	4,102	3,372	2,850	15,750
-------	-------	-------	-------	---------------

In addition, Mercy Corps holds monthly protection coordination meetings with community counselors and protection committee focal points. The purpose of these meetings is to better coordinate activities within the community, seek feedback about protection issues and to collectively think through shared challenges while solidifying technical knowledge. Through these coordination meetings, Mercy Corps is able to improve planning to meet the needs of the communities. The ½ day meetings are well-attended, and some counselors/focal points travel up to 35 kilometers to attend.

Child Protection

During the reporting period, all 232 Mercy Corps protection committee members in Bangassou and Rafai, both old and new, received training on children's rights. In Rafai, all 116 members of the 24 protection committees received a three-day GBV and protection training. Additionally, in Bangassou, 8 new protection committees in Bangassou (a total of 32 individuals) received a three day introductory training on their roles and responsibilities as incoming protection committee members and on children's rights in the Central African context. To complement the three-day refresher training given during the last reporting period, Mercy Corps gave a one-day refresher training to 76 of the 84 previous protection committee members on November 25th. Refresher trainings focus on shared experiences and challenges within the members' contexts and an emphasis on humanitarian principles including the concept of confidentiality.

Unfortunately, the judicial system in the Southeast of the country is next to non-existent. There are only a handful of extremely poorly equipped police and military police present in Bangassou and none in Rafai, and there are currently no courts, prisons or judges to move any criminal cases forward and the civil and military in Bangassou state. As such, Mercy Corps references the current judicial context in protection trainings by emphasizing the preventative and sociocultural nature of protection work. Mercy Corps leans on the understanding that the maintenance and preservation of human rights is a communal responsibility and that it is best to examine the difference between legal laws and cultural laws. A common example might be asking a training group to identify context specific cultural laws such as a husband not allowing his wife to spend much time selling items at the market due to his fear of her meeting another man. Groups are then invited to explore what such an imposition means on the community, the economy and on the individual couple.

Community counselors undertake twice the amount of monthly outreach events as protection committees and are expected to play a larger role in initial case management. To complement the community sensitizations undertaken by community counselors, protection committee members focus on child rights in their community outreach activities. In this last reporting period, Mercy Corps Bangassou capitalized on the co-financing opportunity provided by partner donors to begin providing a small monthly stipend to protection committee members.



Child protection committee training in Bangassou. November 5-7, 2015

During this reporting period, the Bangassou and Rafai protection committees (with an average of 4 members per committee) were able to reach over 17,000 community members on child protection issues via 1-2 hour outdoor presentations twice a month, reaching as many as 100 community members at each event. Committee members advertise the events ahead of time to attract more participants, and often theater and dance are used to attract more interest.

Protection Comm. Sensitization Impact Oct - Dec 2014				
Women	Men	Girls	Boys	Total
4,341	3,729	6,267	2,712	17,049

Play Therapy

There are 36 play therapy groups in both Bangassou and Rafai with approximately 30 children in each group. In the last reporting period in Rafai, all coaches and play therapy group presidents received a 5-day refresher training on the Sports for Peace methodology. In addition, a general meeting of all play therapy coaches and youth presidents was held to further connect the play therapy group leaders with Mercy Corps, and Mercy Corps staff subsequently visited the site of each play therapy micro-project to ascertain the current status of their work. As such, upon the publication of the criteria and selection process, Mercy Corps will distribute a second cash transfer to select play therapy groups to complete their projects.



Play therapy soccer field, Rafai 2014

<u>SECTOR #2</u> Economic Recovery and Market Systems		<i>Objective:</i> Livelihood assets of LRA-affected IDP and host households are restored in order to meet household needs				
Geographic Area (s)		Mbomou Prefecture in Southeastern CAR, with particular focus in Bangassou town				
Beneficiaries Targeted		Total: 3,500		IDP: 2,000		
Beneficiaries Reached (Reporting Period)		Total: 0		IDP: 0		
Beneficiaries Reached (Cumulative)		Total: 3,520		IDP: 2,112		
Subsector: Livelihoods Restoration						
INDICATORS		Disaggregated	Applicable	Cumulative Value Targeted	Reporting Period Reached	Cumulative Period Reached
Number of people assisted through livelihood restoration activities, by sex		Male	Yes	1,470	68	1,557
		Female	Yes	2,030	88	2,593
		Other	NA	NA	NA	NA
Percent of beneficiaries reporting their livelihoods restored within three to six months after receiving support		N/A	Yes	75%	NA	75%
Total USD amount channeled into the program area through livelihoods restoration activities		N/A	Yes	\$19.6 /beneficiary (\$68,600 total)	0	\$19.6 /beneficiary (\$68,600 total)
Subsector: Microfinance						
INDICATORS		Disaggregated	Applicable	Cumulative Value Targeted	Reporting Period Reached	Cumulative Period Reached
Number of people, by sex, or MSEs newly receiving financial services or continuing to receive financial services due to USAID/OFDA support		Male	Yes	189	0	189
		Female	Yes	261	0	261
		Other	NA	NA	NA	NA
Percentage of financial service accounts/groups supported by USAID/OFDA that are functioning properly		N/A	Yes	75% of groups	0	0
Total USD amount channeled into the program area through sub-sector activities		N/A	Yes	\$2,160	0	0

Resilience groups progress:

In Q5 Mercy Corps Bangassou trained 8 resilience groups, or 156 people, in Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) methodology. Of the 156, over half (56%) were women. In both Bangassou and Rafai, 10 new resilience groups have been identified, in part referred by our listening center staff, and these new groups are currently receiving training. . Peer

Educators then are tasked with sensitizing resilience group members on topics such as good governance, literacy and teamwork.

Following the completion of the VSLA trainings in Q6, newly formed resilience groups will receive trainings on income generating activities, and following training, the groups will be eligible to apply for cash or material support from the program to pursue livelihoods recovery activities. Livelihoods trainings are tailored to the groups depending on their specific needs and interests.

<u>SECTOR #3</u> Agriculture and Food Security		<i>Objective:</i> Agricultural livelihoods and income generation opportunities are strengthened for LRA-affected IDP and host households			
Geographic Area (s)	Mbomou Prefecture in Southeastern CAR, with particular focus in Bangassou town				
Beneficiaries Targeted	Total: 2,500 direct; 12,500 indirect		IDP: 1,000 direct; 5,000 indirect		
Beneficiaries Reached (Reporting Period)	Total: 0		IDP: 0		
Beneficiaries Reached (Cumulative)	Total: 2,000		IDP: 2,000		
INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Applicable	Cumulative Value Targeted	Reporting Period Reached	Cumulative Period Reached
Number of people benefiting from seed systems/agricultural input activities, by sex.	Male	Yes	1,000	0	1,160
	Female	Yes	1,000	0	840
	Other	Yes	NA	NA	NA
Projected increase in the number of months of food self-sufficiency due to seed system activities/ agricultural input for beneficiary households.	N/A	Yes	2 months	To be measured at the end of the project	0

Agricultural Tool Kits:

Following an intense preparation period, food security activities officially launched in December in Bangassou and will continue through April of 2015 in preparation for the planting season. Food security activities target both producer's groups (mostly men heads of household) and household gardeners (mostly women and IDP households).



Official launch of SERAP food security activities in Bangassou. December 2014

Based on the most important agricultural livelihoods in the Bangassou region, the program targets specifically 1) agricultural producers, 2) pastoralists, and 3) fish farmers, and producers groups falling into each of the three will be supported to ensure sustainable, year-round food security. The community garden group members will be separated into two groups with approximately 300 women partaking in community garden training and seed distributions and another 300 women receiving training and seeds for individual home gardens. Given the highly mobile nature of IDP populations, Mercy Corps is exploring providing voucher support for mobile food items such as small livestock e.g. chickens.

Lastly, Mercy Corps has identified over a dozen different types of seeds to be distributed amongst beneficiaries in the Bangassou region. We've procured a majority of seed types from the FAO, which offers certified seeds, though corn and bean seeds procured locally (which could not be purchased from FAO) are being tested to ensure adequate germination rates.

SECTOR #4 Humanitarian Coordination and Information Management	<i>Objective:</i> Monthly surveillance data is collected to contribute to the national Early Warning System	
Geographic Area (s)	Mbomou Prefecture in Southeastern CAR	
Beneficiaries Targeted	Total: 93,457	IDP: 10,000
Beneficiaries Reached (Reporting Period)	Total: 0	IDP: 0
Beneficiaries Reached (Cumulative)	Total: 2000	IDP: 2000

Subsector: Information Management					
INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Applicable	Cumulative Value Targeted	Reporting Period Reached	Cumulative Period Reached
Number and percentage of humanitarian organizations utilizing information management services	N/A	Yes	24	8	8 (33%)
Number and percentage of humanitarian organizations directly contributing to information products	N/A	Yes	25	1	9 (36%)
Number of products made available by information management services that are accessed by clients	N/A	Yes	12	1	6 (50%)

All Early Warning System activities finished in early August due to the end of Action Against Hunger's funding for the project. However humanitarian information continues to be regularly shared via the monthly Heads of Office meetings taking place amongst humanitarian actors in both Bangassou and Rafai. Of note, Objective 4 remains unchanged in the modification of assistance award.

4. Monitoring & Evaluation

Program staff members continue to use the GBV Information Management System (GBVIMS) to collect data on gender based violence cases seen in the listening centers. In January of 2015 two listening center staff (one from Rafai and one from Bangassou) will attend a UNFPA sponsored 6-day training in Bangui on the administration of the GBVIMS. All data and information from the first phase of the program's results will be collected for the final program evaluation.

O

5. Coordination

As mentioned above, Mercy Corps has begun to forge informal working partnerships with medical service providers such as MSF-Belgium so as to offer more comprehensive information during trainings and sensitizations of available GBV related services. Mercy Corps participates in weekly security meetings in Bangassou with other humanitarian aid partners in the area, including ACTED, MSF-Belgium, CRS and Cordaid, in order to share important security related information. These same NGOs meet monthly to report on activities and coordinate any potentially over-lapping programming. In addition, Mercy Corps is a member of the Southeast coordination mechanism led by OCHA held in Bangui to coordinate among all actors in the Mbomou and Haut-Mbomou regions. Finally, Mercy Corps shares key information on the program activities and security in the South East at Protection Cluster meetings, GBV and Child Protection sub-cluster meetings and Food Security Meetings held on a bi-weekly basis in Bangui.

6. Conclusion and Upcoming Activities

The majority of SERAP activities in Bangassou for the next reporting period will focus on food security while Rafai will continue to focus on protection activities. The agricultural calendar moves quickly and Mercy Corps plans to have undertaken the bulk of the food security activities by the end of the next reporting period.

Priorities over the next reporting period will therefore include:

- Agricultural trainings
- The distribution of seeds and tools to over 2,500 beneficiaries in and around Bangassou, post distribution monitoring and follow up.
- Follow-up on the purchase of two vehicles for the establishment of the mobile Listening Centers. Logistical and security difficulties have thus far prevented their purchase.
- Continuation of Listening Center activities as well as community counselor and protection committee sensitizations.